

VZCZCXRO3456  
RR RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK  
DE RUEHGB #4055/01 3030604  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
R 300604Z OCT 06  
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD  
TO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE  
INFO RHEHWSR/WHITE HOUSE SITUATION ROOM WASHINGTON DC  
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC  
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC//NSC//  
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7744

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 004055

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/29/2016  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: PRT ERBIL: DEPUTY KNA SPEAKER KAMAL KIRKUKI ON  
KIRKUK, PKK, AND TURKEY

Classified By: Political Counselor Margaret Scobey for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) This is a PRT Erbil cable.

12. (C) SUMMARY: Kamal Kirkuki, Deputy Speaker of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Kurdistan National Assembly (KNA) and member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) told Erbil IPAO at his office October 18 that KRG control of Kirkuk is essential for future independence, and Turkey's continuing economic relations with the KRG are contingent on Turkish acquiescence to the change. END SUMMARY

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Democracy and the Kurds  
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13. (C) Kirkuki, known to Erbil IPAO as a Kirkuk Provincial Council Member in 2004, takes a hard line behind a velvet curtain on issues of Kurdish independence and control of Kirkuk. With poetic imagery, Kirkuki described democracy as 'the sweet river water that flows into Iraq from and through Kurdistan'. He said a strong Kurdistan would be an example for Iraq and all of the Middle East. On the other hand, Kirkuki said, Iraq, Syria, and Iran are 'very primitive lands' that all make problems for Kurds. He said Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Sudan are also providing terrorists, harming Iraq's security, but he stopped short of accusing these governments of actively supporting terrorism.

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Turkey and the Kurds  
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14. (C) Kirkuki said the KRG is not against Turkey, and commercial exchanges are welcome. However, he said, Turkish intervention in Iraqi affairs is unacceptable. Kirkuki suggested Turkey could productively move forward in a commercial and political alliance with Kurdistan. He explained that the KRG is not racist, and will not oppose Turkey simply because they persecute Turkish Kurds. Kirkuki said Turkey and the KRG need to look forward toward their mutual benefits.  
(COMMENT: Kirkuk displayed a willingness to disregard the situation of Turkish Kurds that is at variance with the public policy of the KRG. It is not clear whether

this was a personal view or an indication of a policy shift. Kirkuki's views in the past have been very closely tied to KDP positions. END COMMENT)

15. (C) Referring to the PKK, Kirkuki stated that the KRG is completely opposed to 'any group inside Iraq's borders attacking its neighbors', and reminded IPAO that KDP lost many Peshmerga to the PKK during fighting in the 1990s. He asserted that the primary motivation for PKK support in Turkey is in fact Turkey's military action against the group and the Kurds of Turkey. Turkish actions, he claimed, increase the PKK's size and level of public support -- without Turkish offensives the PKK would be weak. He pointed out that civilian and military views in Turkey differ, and he claimed the Turkish military wants to foment a crisis with PKK in the KRG to divert attention from problems with Syria and Iran as well as an internal Islamist challenge. The 'U.S. role in the game', Kirkuki said, is to pressure Turkey to pull back, thereby reducing PKK support and relieving KRG leaders of the need to take public measures against the PKK inside Iraq. Although Turkey made strong statements about the PKK, Kirkuki said this is an excuse and Turkey's real issue is Kirkuk.

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Kirkuk or Fight!  
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16. (C) Kirkuki said all Kurds are friends of the U.S.; however, if Turkey or any other country causes problems for the KRG, that will end the hope of democracy in all of Iraq. Asked to elaborate, Kirkuki said Kurds would respond militarily to provocation, including in Kirkuk, and this would result in a general breakdown in the country as a whole. He strongly criticized Turkey for making any statements on Kirkuk, saying it is an Iraqi city within the Kurdistan geographical region.

17. (C) Kirkuki contended that Kurdish victories in Kirkuk local and provincial elections (average of 60 percent) constitute proof of support for KRG presence. However, he said, Saddam Hussein's redistricting of Kirkuk province has not yet been resolved. (NOTE: Determining the electoral roll in Kirkuk was difficult and subject to extraordinary political pressure, resulting in IECI (Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq) permission for displaced Kurds in the KRG to vote in Kirkuk's elections. These voters also participated in the KRG elections. Redrawing provincial borders also affects PUK and KDP relative geographic extent and 'areas of operation'. END NOTE)

18. (C) Kirkuki stressed that the Kirkuk referendum date of December 31, 2007 must be maintained, just as the US insisted on election deadlines in the past. He explained that Kurds in Kirkuk have negative feelings about 'Arabization' and blame the Arabs of Kirkuk for all their problems. Kirkuki quoted some Kurdish returnees to Kirkuk as calling Arabs 'the hands and eyes of Saddam', and

he said they have sought revenge through violence against Arabs. This was rejected by the KDP and PUK, Kirkuki said, and should be done through legal means, including Article 140. "We need to find a legal solution," he said, "and not repeat the illegal ways of Saddam Hussein." Kirkuki repeated the Kurdish mantra: expel the Arabs from Kirkuk and return them to other parts of the country; give them jobs similar to those they presently hold; and provide compensation, so they are not 'thrown in the street'. With an attempt at generosity, Kirkuki granted that following 'normalization' and a referendum granting the KRG control over Kirkuk, Arabs could be allowed to work in Kirkuk.

¶9. (C) Returning to a more rigid line, he explained that expelling Arabs from Kirkuk was necessary 'to save them from danger', because if the KRG does not win in the referendum, Kurds will attack Arabs 'in a civil war'. Kirkuki said the future of Kirkuk will determine the future safety of Iraq. "Article 140 is an anesthetic for Kurds in Kirkuk; if the results are not what they want, the Kurds will feel the pain and anger." Kurds in Kirkuk have expectations, he said, and the KRG will not be able to control their anger if Article 140 and the referendum do not produce a victory for the KRG. (NOTE: 'Arabization' refers to Saddam Hussein's policy of increasing the Arab proportion of Kirkuk's population, through forced manipulation of both Arab and Kurdish/Turkman populations. 'Normalization' in the context of Kirkuk is used by the Kurds to refer to a majority-Kurdish city. The term 'resident' in Kirkuk is politically highly charged, and has been variously interpreted as having tribal/ancestral ties, historical rights, or simple presence. END NOTE)

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Unity, federalism, and the draft constitution  
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¶10. (C) Discussing Iraqi unity and federalism, Kirkuki considered unity a mistake for Iraq because, in the hands of the wrong individual, the country could experience worse than the previous regime. Federalism, on the other hand, he considered protection against Iraq's difficulties today by dividing the country, preventing instability from spreading, and restraining would-be 'emperors'. Kirkuki's interpretation of unity was tantamount to 'centralization'; conversely, he used 'federalism' as synonymous with 'autonomy'.

¶11. (C) The KRG draft constitution, Kirkuki explained, was drawn from all historical sources in the KRG, with the agreement of 36 political parties. Groups, parties, and academics are presently encouraged to send in comments, and on December 1, 2006 the KNA constitutional committee will begin consolidating the information. In his opinion, this is the best way to ensure that all viewpoints are

represented and that the new constitution will be ratified without conflict or delay.  
(Note: Many members of the KNA do not have copies of the draft, nor is it widely distributed in the region. There is no central or publicized mechanism for returning comments. END NOTE)

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COMMENT  
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¶12. (C) The Arab population of Kirkuk is both Sunni and Shia, with most Sunnis traditional residents of Kirkuk and many Shia arriving within the past 40 years. The Shia Turkman population is traditionally resident in Kirkuk province. Many Arabs, particularly Shia, were themselves displaced during Saddam's efforts to demolish opposition groups in the south. Such families are into their third generation in Kirkuk, and the lack of absorptive capacity in the south makes it unlikely that they will successfully integrate without major funding and focused development initiatives in receiving regions if forced out of Kirkuk. Given their bottom-heavy population pyramid, those expelled to the south could be fertile ground for militias and other extremist groups.

¶13. (C) Kirkuki, though a long-standing KDP leader in Kirkuk, is relatively new to the public scene in the KRG. His extensive Peshmerga experience is his tie to other KRG politicians. Kirkuki speaks good English and fluent German, and he is comfortable meeting with a range of interlocutors. He speaks softly when not orating and cannot be heard in a large room, and he prefers smaller groups for unstructured discussion.  
KHALILZAD